**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND ARTICLE 1, CHAPTER 39, TITLE 59 OF THE 1976 CODE, RELATING TO HIGH SCHOOLS, BY ADDING SECTION 59‑39‑105, TO PROVIDE THAT CERTAIN SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS MAY OBTAIN OCCUPATIONAL CREDENTIAL CERTIFICATES DEVELOPED AND ENDORSED BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, TO PROVIDE CERTAIN REQUIREMENTS FOR THESE CERTIFICATES, TO IMPOSE CERTAIN RELATED REQUIREMENTS ON THE DEPARTMENT AND THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION, TO PROVIDE THAT THESE PROVISIONS DO NOT PROVIDE SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL RIGHTS BEYOND THOSE SPECIFICALLY GUARANTEED BY FEDERAL AND STATE LAW OR DISTRICT POLICY, AND TO PROVIDE THAT PARTICIPATION IN THIS PROGRAM BY DISTRICTS IS VOLUNTARY.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. Article 1, Chapter 39, Title 59 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 59‑39‑105. (A) The State Department of Education shall provide eligible special education students on a non‑diploma track, as defined by state and federal law, the opportunity to obtain an occupational credential certificate approved by the State Board of Education beginning with eligible students who have completed all state‑established criteria by the end of the 2018‑2019 school year.

(B) The number of units required for an occupational credential certificate must be equal to the number of credit hours required for a standard high school diploma, as prescribed by the board by regulation, but must include a combination of academic instruction, occupational preparation instruction, and job and community skills training. To receive an occupational credential certificate, a participating special education student must complete the requisite twenty‑four units as prescribed by the board by regulation.

(C)(1) Before January 1, 2018, the department shall submit for consideration and approval by the board a proposal that outlines course requirements, state criteria related to those twenty‑four units, and standards for other criteria applicable to the credential. The department also shall propose criteria for the eligibility to pursue the occupational credential system and a reporting system for monitoring special education students who pursue this certificate instead of a standard high school diploma.

(2) The department shall share relevant regulations, guidance, and expectations for occupational credential certificates with local school districts before July 1, 2018.

(D) The provisions of this section do not provide special education students with additional rights beyond those specifically guaranteed by federal and state law or district policy. The participation of a district in this program is voluntary.

(E) Occupational credential certificates issued by the State must be uniform and equivalent to the standard state diploma in every respect, particularly in color, size, lettering, and marking.”

SECTION 2. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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